

Edward Perry: From my mining – from the beginning of my mining career, you know, when I first started in the mines, there wasn't any organized labor. A day's work usually was the day. You worked from daylight till dark, you know? Sometimes before daylight and sometimes after dark when you got home. It was – I started in 1918 over here at old Cora. You know where that is?

Interviewer: No. Where is that?

Edward Perry: Right over between here and Logan. That's all mined out years ago. And I went from there to Mingo County. At Kermit, I worked in the mine a while and it was – a fellow was fortunate, you know, to make anything. At the time, if he was single, boarding – the time he paid his board, he didn't have but little left, you know?

And then, 1921, I went to the Warfare Mining Company and I worked there 10 years. And all this time they were trying to organize us. The miners – John L. Lewis was a tall man and then, there's an old lady – they called her Mother Jones. You know, she was a great worker for organized labor. They had it pretty rough.

If the men – I remember now, in Mingo County, when the men would come out, you know, or go to signing up, they would come around there once in a while and the men would try to organize, you know, but the coal operators naturally was against organized labor. So, they wanted to have all of us say, I reckon, the men not honor the work. So, they would set them out of the houses. They'd have to live out in tents, you know, and men with big families in just one little old maybe 15-20-foot tent, you know, it's a pretty rough life. Well, along about then, at Matewan, West Virginia, they got a bunch of men up there.

They tried to – they were trying to organize. And the coal operator there – I don't know the company – but anyway, the coal operators, they called – they got eviction warrants for those miners. Set them out of the house. Now, this, I didn't see but I remember and know pretty well what it was. They got eviction warrants for those and they had to get a bunch of detectives from over in Virginia.

They called them Baldwin-Felts Detectives, you know? They come over, set these people out. Evict them. Well, along at the time they was leaving, they had completed their job. Well, they got into a ruckus at the station and there was a bunch of men killed. And about all those detectives got killed.

Interviewer: They had a shootout there at the station.

- Edward Perry:* I'm sorry? Huh?
- Interviewer:* They had a shootout there at the station?
- Edward Perry:* Yeah. At Matewan Station. And they was – after that, you know, it made it a little more, "Well, okay." They would have somebody – wouldn't get shot. Well, then, wasn't still doing no good. Then, after Franklin D. Roosevelt got elected president –
- Interviewer:* Just a second. You were out on strike there in Mingo County.
- Edward Perry:* Huh?
- Interviewer:* You were out on strike in Mingo County.
- Edward Perry:* They were – yeah, they were shaping – they were trying to organize, you know?
- Interviewer:* Uh-huh.
- Edward Perry:* It's not so much to come out on strike. The men just wouldn't work, you know? And they wouldn't agree to let them organize; they wouldn't work. And even if he would've wanted to work, the company would have had to have their say, you know?
- Interviewer:* Yeah. How long did they stay out of work?
- Edward Perry:* Anyway, that's old history – that Matewan shootout. Just like the Blair Mountain episode, you know? That's all. I wasn't in Logan County at that time. They were only trying to organize.
- That's what brought the whole situation up. The men – the miners – were trying to organize. Somebody was instructing them, you know? So, Roosevelt, after he got elected president, he granted a right for a collective burden and they had to let them organize, you know? Well, it started off pretty good.
- They'd still have friction but not like before, you know? And now, it's leveled off to they're not having much trouble, you know, any more about – the contracts are not so hard to get. We used to stay up to get a contract, you know, if we got anything any better. One time here, if that works, since that worked for strip miners, there's another six to seven days where they were taking a little bit more money than what we're getting, you know? That's the only way

they got it. They had to swing their weight to get it, you know. But —

Interviewer: Now, I understood that union organizers came down into Mingo in 1919 and signed guys up for the union and that's why you went out on strike for recognition.

Edward Perry: No. I wasn't working up there at that time. It's just that I knew the fellas that were, you see?

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Hm-hmm.

Edward Perry: I knew people that implicated then and, well, now, they – there was friction from both sides. Both sides was having – I would say it would be a little bit of dirty work done but in anything that's worthwhile, there's always friction to start it off. It don't start off smooth on both sides, you know? But I think it's a great thing, organized labor, but I don't know if it's being handled like it should be.

Interviewer: Do you remember any examples of the kind of friction that you're talking about between the miners and the coal operators?

Edward Perry: Back where I was telling you – where she _____ – she was a little girl – about setting those people out and them living in tents, you know, if they signed up for that. I knew one man lived in a tent – that place _____ – do you remember them people? As for personal, no. The most I know that was done just to be [*Inaudible*]. They would have a system every so often – they loaded coal by hand and shovel and they would add the system – what you call "docking" you know, like a quarter or what you got out of the car.

They'd call it lye or find a piece of slate on it, you know? This is about it. Well, when that day come around, just about everybody got docked regardless. That was a lot of friction. Caused a lot of heat, you know, because the men were working, as you might say, from daylight to dark for a very small wage and well, you heard the old saying about a dollar a day of a scrap and that's what you got, you know?

But sometimes, they'd do a lot of figuring before a miner would get his dollar, you know? It was rough. That's about the most friction. I wouldn't advocate they did not violence, you know, like some of them fellas were. I didn't believe in that kind of –

Interviewer: Was there any violence down there?

Edward Perry: Just mostly fists and stone, rocks – when you ask, I seen some of that.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Edward Perry: No shooting. They'd come out their _____ one time – a little episode I remember – and they got some men to come – I don't know where the men was really from; Kentucky or somewhere – but they called the "scabs" – you know, union rustlers. And those men had come out and I knew some of them men personally and my uncle lived there, you know? Well, them men worked that day but these boys was waiting on one to come out, you know? And boy, if they didn't come out that street there where them fellas boarded around them and *[Inaudible due to laughing]*.

They knew run out the next day. They got out of there that night, you know, those fellows did. And they – the friction didn't build up to no, what you call, bloodshed. They had – even when they first come here, they were still pretty _____. They would have their friction between the company and the union and usually, if you had a good strong union man, they tried to get rid of him, you know – to fire him or – you know, some men have got influence; others haven't, you know?

Some men just – it's just a gift, I reckon, that they can just walk out there and talk to a bunch of men and just have them follow them anywhere they go and others will talk all day and nobody follows. It's – they use a different type of psychology, I guess.

[Laughter]

Interviewer: Now, usually, the guys who were talking about the union and organizing the union, were they working in the mines or were they from outside and they come in, talk about it?

Edward Perry: Well, the organizers were from other places, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Edward Perry: They had to be. They couldn't – there wasn't an organizer at each mine. Now, after the union come, you had a mine committee in your union. Each local union had a mine committee that took care of the new membership. As they come in, they had to sign up, you know?

But in organizing, these fellas would call meetings and send speakers, naturally, from the international union and these speakers would do the talking and the organizing. Well, the men were eager to find an outlet from a channel of life that – from a lot they were _____ in – they were seeking, as you might say, deliverance. They wanted out where they could hold their head up. In other words, it's miners are more classed like brutes back in old times. But now, they pretty good, most of them.

They go to work. But the old miners, they don't get out of it what they expected.

Interviewer: Was your father a miner?

Edward Perry: Huh?

Interviewer: Was your father a miner?

Edward Perry: No.

Interviewer: What? Did he work a farm?

Edward Perry: He was a farmer.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. From around here?

Edward Perry: No. From Wayne County.

Interviewer: Oh, really? Uh-huh.

Edward Perry: I was born and growed up there, then I left, 18 years old, and I just went out and I went to the mines.

Interviewer: Did you ever work anything else besides the mines?

Edward Perry: No. Just a little – maybe when I didn't have a job in the mines or they'd shut down. A lot of mines went bankrupt back in the '20s, you know, and early '30s. The mine I worked at, I worked 10 years back there then they – they went bankrupt. I think they broke down.

Then, I worked just anything I could get a day's work in. Wasn't much more then from '30 – from late '20s up to in the early '30s. There wasn't much work, you know? It just got bad back then – that depression coming on. Mines – little mines – they awake maybe two days.

But as for the miner, as for the mining – mining career started – I started working the mine about 19 and 18 over there at old Cora. Worked the well there with a fella, got an experienced miner and I went in with him and then worked for a dollar a day. That's what I started out for. Then, from that, I just go – went to Kermit, where I was telling you, where they had _____. Worked there for a long time.

It had a whole lot of – they had quite a bit of friction but it mostly was – as I said, it was no lives lost in their friction. It's just sometimes, the fellas lock up in fistfights, you know, which happened.

Interviewer: Usually, when there was a fist fight, was it between miners and these strike breakers – these scabs?

Edward Perry: Yeah. Mostly that's what it was. When these fellas would come into work, the company would just say they'd fire a whole bunch of men 'cause they wanted to organize. Now, that would happen, you know, and they'd fire them and they'd put them out of their houses. That's mostly – they wouldn't come out and strike.

They had to come out, you know, when it's time to organize. Like I say, that's what brought on that Matewan shootout – setting people out of their houses. Them detectives come in there and set out a lot of people and a fella told me that was there and he was an organizer in there. A fry boy told me that they set a woman out in the road on the cut, you know? They called them Baldwin-Felts Detectives.

They'd go all over the United States and do that kind of work, you know? They was nothing more than strike breakers. Detective agencies were only – they used them as a way of as far back as union organized labor ever started, they used them kind of people, you know, to break them, to – I don't know. They never really, I don't reckon, abused or killed anybody or beat 'em up. But they, just like that, sent them out and I don't know what the – they got – some fella that was set out and he got into it with one or two of those detectives.

Anyway, the trouble started. I guess the miners was wanting it to start no doubt. It wound up – they had all got shot and two miners was killed in it and the mayor of the town of Matewan was killed in it. And then, the man that was the leader of them miner that day, he – wasn't but a few months after that he went to Welch and he

was implicated with the United Mine Worker. He went to Welch for trial in this shootout they had and when he got up at Welch, it was a policeman – the Chief of Police at Matewan, too – and he got up there at Welch and before they went up on the hill, some law officer that was with him told him – he got up there to go in for trial; he better leave his guns down, you know, somewhere till _____ come back.

They left their guns. And they got up pretty well the top of the steps – the Courthouse at Welch – and they set in from the inside the courthouse shooting. Killed both of them. You know, it was – nobody ever knew who it was. They had a lot of reign on them and law and accusations but no –

Interviewer: Was it one of these Baldwin-Felts agents?

Edward Perry: They don't know.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Edward Perry: Now, both of them Felts agents that was there – it could have been from them or they could have had the frame up. It was a set up, you know, that killed him. 'Cause he was a Hatfield – Sid Hatfield.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. I remember Ed Chambers was with him that day, wasn't he?

Edward Perry: What'd you say?

Interviewer: Wasn't Ed Chambers with him that day?

Edward Perry: He was the man that was with –

Interviewer: That's what I thought. Uh-huh.

Edward Perry: He was the man that was with Sid when Sid was killed. They were both killed, weren't they?

Interviewer: Hm-hmm. I think that's right.

Edward Perry: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did people react to that when they found out that Sid and Ed had been shot?

Edward Perry:

Well, they didn't react as they would as this damn time. It didn't have transportation. I guess they would have cried then and there by the hundreds – at this day and time they would. But back then, there wasn't no transportation and no – you get to Matewan from Williamson – I mean, you get to Welch from Williamson, you had to go by train, you know? They didn't act very good about it.

There was none of them like that because he was a friend to the organized labor, but there wasn't any aftermath to this, you know? Probably the law up there – just like the law at Williamson, like the law in Logan County and just about all over the state where there's mining districts – they control – pretty well control the law, you know? They would maneuver to get their men elected to the law. Like, this Blair Mountain strike, you know, when Don Chafin was the sheriff of Logan County and they'd pay him so much at time – what I've been told – to get the coal out to protect him. So, that's the way it was at the _____ County.

So, the men were more or less alone – on their own – a group of working men, with no capital or nothing in them. Until – it had to come from the outside in the form of organizers. And then, they got their sentiment running that way but it still wasn't doing too good with it until Roosevelt was elected and they got the right for collective bargaining. And then, they had a right to tell them what they'd work for, you know? Otherwise, you work for what they say.

Interviewer:

You know, I wonder sometimes what would have happened if Roosevelt hadn't allowed for collective bargaining.

Edward Perry:

There would have been bloodshed bad, you know? It would have been bad. It's sort of like basing it – it wasn't as drastic as slavery but it was just about, you know? It was – a miner – you worked for what they paid, now. I've loaded four-ton cars of coal for \$0.45. You had a four ton of coal – one ton of coal to hold a great big – I don't dare [*Inaudible due to laughter*].

Interviewer:

Yeah. I wouldn't know.

Edward Perry:

They had to get – but first, they had to get the sentiment of people with power. That – when they began getting the sentiment of people with power – and then, if you're _____, you're not old enough to know it by experience but you read history – Roosevelt was a humatarian. He was a man for people. He treated rich – he was a rich man his self but you know, he was what I call a humatarian.

And he could see both sides of the picture. We don't have many men like that. Most of them just see their side. But he was a pretty grand in this right for collective bargaining. Lots of mines then shut down – wouldn't never run no more – before they'd let the men have a say in it.

Interviewer: Hm-hmm. What about the mine where you were working at that time?

Edward Perry: What you say?

Interviewer: What about the mine where you were working at that time?

Edward Perry: The mine that I was working at – the mine that I'd been working at at that time went bankrupt, you know, in 1930. Then, I had to work at what I could get, you know, for a few years. And then, I come here in '37 but I'd work for a year before that. But when I come here, everything already had the union and everything. But they still had – as I said, they had friction, but they – miner had to sort of fling his weight, you know?

They had some power on their side. They had the law – supposed to have – on their side. But the company could always get state police or deputies to come in and sort of patrol where they was figuring they was gonna have friction, you know? I guess they can to this date, too. Naturally, money controls in about anything.

But after the union got in and got built up, pretty good treasure of their own, then they could swing more – the stronger they go financially, the more powerful they got so they could swing their weight more, you know?

Interviewer: Hm-hmm. Sure.

Edward Perry: Now, will you – you'll talk to Mace?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Edward Perry: Now, he's an old miner. He remembers quite a bit.

Interviewer: Yeah. He does. Were you acquainted with any of the district officers of the United Mine Workers back in the '20s and the '30s – Frank Keeny or Mooney? Any of those guys?

Edward Perry:

I wasn't acquainted. The first district officer I got acquainted with was in Logan County – one of the – Red Cassidy and Melvin Treol and I don't know who the other are. But some of them are tricky, too, I guess, you know? Money – we've been fortunate. They wouldn't – none of them ever got tricky enough or crooked enough to break the union at no point. Sometimes they, I guess, in the past, they got 'em bent, but the union survived.

It's, right now, a more shaky situation than it's been in a long time – all this split up, you know? Miners for Democracy and the other side – then, there's another disabled miners' outfit. They really didn't do all those miners right.

Interviewer:

Who didn't?

Edward Perry:

The union.

Interviewer:

Yeah. That's for sure.

Edward Perry:

I've _____ all my life. I don't get no pension, you know? I made the mistake myself, though. Section _____ for two years and then, they wouldn't let me back in again. The local union would have.

The district officers would have. But they wouldn't up in many headquarters, you know. But that just happened to some. It didn't – no, I was an officer in this local union here for several years. Recording secretary and _____.

We had to have quite a bit of moving around to do, you know, when they strike something out and sometimes, the company – if they make it hard on anybody, it's somebody in – an officer, you know, they can make it hard on your job or where they place –

[End of Audio]